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JOURNAL OF THE MUHYIDDIN IBN ʻARABI SOCIETY

VOLUME 65, 2019

Ibn ʿArabī's *Kitāb al-Bāʾ*

The Truth through which the heavens and the earth were created

Hülya Küçük and Stephen Hirtenstein

The *Kitāb al-Bāʾ* is one of Ibn ʿArabī's shorter treatises composed when he had already started writing his monumental *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*. The text mentions Chapter 2 of the *Futūḥāt* (on the letters) as having already been written, as well as the *Book of 96* (*Kitāb Sitta wa-tisʿīn*), which is another name for the *Book of the Mīm, the Wāw and the Nūn*. At the same time, Chapter 5 of the *Futūḥāt* contains many of the remarks made here about the *bāʾ*, in an abridged form,[1] from which it is clear that this treatise must have been composed in the early stages of the *Futūḥāt*. In addition, we are fortunate to have an extant copy written in the author's distinctive hand, held in the Yusuf Ağa Library in Konya, which is part of a collection of other treatises (MS 4868) dated between 602H and 617H. Given that the handwriting appears very similar to that which can be seen on the copy of *Ḥilyat al-abdāl* in the same codex, which is dated 602H in Malatya, we may take this as the most likely approximate date. According to Osman Yahia, the *Kitāb al-Bāʾ* was composed in 602H in Jerusalem, but this assumption seems to have been due to a misreading of one of the best early copies of the manuscript, Veliyuddin 51,[2] which includes copies of works that were composed in the years 601H and 602H. There is no mention of a place of composition, so all that we can say is that it is most likely

1. In Chap. 5 Ibn ʿArabī discusses the *bāʾ* of *bismillāh* in language that is often identical to that used in this treatise. See *Fut*.I.102.

2. Veliyuddin MS 51 (Beyazit Library), fols. 125a–131b, a copy made in 762H from an original in the hand of Ibn ʿArabī, which almost certainly means the holograph copy in Yusuf Ağa MS 4868, fols. 1a–11a. The Yusuf Ağa folio numbers only indicate the internal pages, not the original numbering, as the full collection has unfortunately been broken up and mostly lost.

that the *Kitāb al-Bāʾ* was composed at some point during 601/1205 or 602/1206, although the place is unknown.[3]

Osman Yahia numbered the work as RG 71 in his classification of the works of Ibn ʿArabī, and he provides various variant titles: *Risāla fī taḥqīq al-Bāʾ wa-asrārih*,[4] *Risālat al-Bāʾ*,[5] *Risālat al-Bāʾ fī ḥaqāʾiq al-ilāhiyya wa-l-raqāʾiq al-rūḥāniyya*,[6] *Risālat al-asrār bi-l-bāʾ ẓahar* (or: *ẓuhūr*) *al-wujūd*,[7] *Miftāḥ dār al-ḥaqīqa* (or *al-ḥaqāʾiq*), *Kitāb al-raqāʾiq al-rūḥāniyya*, *Kitāb al-Qāf wa-huwa Kitāb al-Bāʾ*, *al-Bāʾ wa-asrārih*.[8] This is a much-copied work, with many extant copies held in Turkish libraries. We may also note that in his *Fihrist* (no. 83), which records the names of the works he composed, Ibn ʿArabī states that the *Kitāb Bāʾ* (without the definite article) is also described as 'the Book of Glorious Dignity' (*K. al-Majd)*. This is perhaps an allusion to the eminence of the letter *bāʾ* over other letters.[9]

Ibn ʿArabī explains the reason why he composed this treatise in the following way: he was asked by an unnamed close friend or companion to compose something in response to a vision the latter had had while he was in a spiritual gathering. According to the account given by Ibn ʿArabī, the man heard a mysterious voice addressing his interior, saying: 'All things manifest through the *bāʾ*, and the *bāʾ* has a certain matter within it.' Upon hearing this, he was extremely bewildered. Then he was told to 'multiply 10 by 10'. He was then returned to the visible world. Ibn ʿArabī says that in this treatise he will explain the meaning of this curious and somewhat obscure address from the invisible world.[10]

3. From Veliyuddin 51 we might hazard a guess that it was composed either in Malatya or Damascus. See Jane Clark and Denis McAuley, 'Some Notes on the Manuscript Veliyuddin 51', *JMIAS* 40 (2006), pp. 101–15.

4. See Bağdatlı Vehbi MS 714 (Süleymaniye Library).

5. See İbrahim Efendi MS 809 (Süleymaniye Library).

6. See Veliyuddin Efendi MS 1826 (Beyazit Library).

7. See al-Zāhiriyya MS 123 (Damascus, quoted from Suʿād al-Ḥakīm, *al-Muʿjam al-ṣūfī*, Beirut, 1981, pp. 181, 1287).

8. See Osman Yahia, *Histoire et Classification de l'œuvre d'Ibn ʿArabī* (Damascus, 1964), vol. 1, pp. 180–1.

9. For this reference I am grateful to Bakri Aladdin for his forthcoming critical edition of both *Fihrist* and *Ijāza*, to be published in Damascus in 2019.

10. Yusuf Ağa MS 4868/2, fol. 3b.

The main subject of the treatise is, therefore, the nature of the letter *bāʾ*, the second letter of the Arabic alphabet, and its various characteristics. In the process of his explanation Ibn ʿArabī utilises several different ways of viewing the *bāʾ*, such as its numerical value according to the *abjad* alphanumeric system (2), its letter-form (ب) and its various grammatical usages as a preposition and particle. In addition to references to the Quran and various *ḥadīth*s as well as Chapter 2 of his *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*,[11] he quotes the words of earlier Sufis, sometimes explicitly as in the case of Junayd al-Baghdādī (d.297/909), Abū Bakr al-Shiblī (d.334/945) and Abū Madyan (d.594/1198), sometimes without naming them, as is the case with the potentially more controversial al-Ḥallāj (d.309/922).[12] There is also an allusion to a term borrowed from his Andalusian predecessor Ibn Barrajān (d.536/1141, also unnamed), one that was very significant for his understanding of unity and plurality: *al-Ḥaqq al-makhlūq bihi l-samāwāt wa-l-arḍ* (the Truth through which the heavens and the earth were created).[13]

Ibn ʿArabī was not the first to discuss Arabic letters and their symbolism. Sahl al-Tustarī (d.283/896) can be regarded as the first Sufi author on this science in his *Risālat al-ḥurūf*,[14] which influenced Ibn Masarra (d.319/931) in his *Kitāb khawāṣṣ al-ḥurūf.*[15] In addition, *al-Lumaʿ* by Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj (d.378/988) has a concise but very useful section on the science of the letters, or rather, on

11. See ibid. fols. 5a and 11a.

12. See ibid. fol. 4b.

13. See ibid. fols. 4a, 7a and 9a. For a discussion of this term, see Hülya Küçük, 'Ibn Barrajān's Views and Legacy', Part 2 of 'Light Upon Light in Andalusian Sufism: Abū l-Ḥakam Ibn Barrajān (d.536/1141) and Muhyī l-Dīn Ibn al-ʿArabī (d.638/1240) as the Evolver of His Hermeneutism', *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 163/2 (2013), pp. 402–3.

14. The text has been edited in Kamāl Jaʿfar, *Min al-turāth al-Ṣūfī* (Cairo, 1974).

15. See Binyamin Abrahamov, *Ibn ʿArabī and the Sufis* (Oxford, 2014), pp. 100–1. For a fuller description of Ibn Masarra's treatment of the letters and a comparison with the Shiʿi tradition, see Michael Ebstein, *Mysticism and Philosophy in al-Andalus: Ibn Masarra, Ibn ʿArabī and the Ismāʿīlī Tradition* (Leiden, 2014), especially pp. 77–122; see also Garrido-Clemente, Pilar, *El Inicio de la ciencia de las letras en el Islam: la Risālat al-ḥurūf del sufi Sahl al-Tustarī* (Madrid, 2010); idem, 'The Science of Letters in Ibn Masarra: Unified Word, Unified World', in *JMIAS* 47 (2010), pp. 47–61.

the relation between the letters and God's most beautiful Names. In the second paragraph of this section we find a response by Abū al-ʿAbbās Ibn ʿAṭāʾ al-Adamī (d.309/922) on being asked what the hearts of gnostics (*ʿārifīn*) rely upon and are reassured by, which echoes some of the ideas in Ibn ʿArabī's treatise: '[they rely upon] the first letter of His Book, the *bāʾ* of *Bismillāh al-raḥmān al-raḥīm*. This means that it is through God (*bi-llāh*) that things manifest and through Him they are annihilated; through His Self-disclosure (*bi-tajallīh*) they are graced and through His concealment they are without grace.'[16]

However, Ibn ʿArabī's exposition goes much further than his predecessors in his detailed contemplation of the profundity of letters, a knowledge which he stresses belongs specifically to God's friends (*awliyāʾ*) and is part of the spiritual knowledge of Jesus.[17] For him, a letter is a vessel of revelation, and every aspect of its form is a pointer to divine realities. Letters can be viewed under three aspects: their phonetic or aural form; their written or visual form; and their conceptual or imaginal form, which he also calls their 'summoning' form – this remains within the realm of imagination, and has effect through the power of spiritual concentration (*himma*).[18] All three of these elements are included in this treatise more or less explicitly, as well as grammatical considerations specific to the letter *bāʾ*.

It is important to note that Ibn ʿArabī does not provide one single definitive way of viewing the *bāʾ*. This treatise, for example, provides a different point of view to that which he elaborates in Chapter 2 of the *Futūḥāt*, where he examines the various degrees and movements of the letters, and in the more cosmological Chapter 198, where the second degree belongs not to the *bāʾ* but to the letter *hāʾ* (on the basis of articulation on the breath rather than the order of *abjad*) – although in that schema the *bāʾ* is presented as the twenty-sixth degree of manifestation (corresponding to the jinn), the first three divine Names of the creative cycle (*al-Badīʿ*, *al-Bāʿith*,

16. Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj, *al-Lumaʿ*, ed. ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm Mahmūd and Tāhā ʿAbd al-Bāqī Surūr (Baghdad, 1960), pp. 124–5.

17. See *Fut*.I.167–9, 190.

18. See *Fut*.I.190–1.

al-Bāṭin) all notably begin with the letter *bāʾ*.[19] In Chapter 2 he presents the *bāʾ* from various perspectives and in brief summary terms: phonologically, where it appears along with the *mīm* and *wāw* as letters of the manifest world (*al-mulk wa-l-shahāda*); graphically, where it is related to *tāʾ*, *thāʾ*, *yāʾ* and *nūn*; numerologically, as corresponding to the number 2; allusively, as the distinctiveness of the true human reality which he refers to as 'the clear Essence of purity' (*ʿayn ṣafāʾ al-khulāṣa*) and the 'elite of the elite' (*khāṣṣat al-khāṣṣa*); elementally, as fire, and so on.[20]

Many of these aspects are dealt with in more detail in the *Kitāb al-Bāʾ*: here his main concern is with the second letter of the alphabet as a symbol of that which emerges from the *alif* of Absolute Unity (*aḥadiyya*) and thereby initiates the whole process of creation. In this sense it forms a complement to his treatise on the first letter of the Arabic alphabet, *Kitāb al-Alif*,[21] and others.[22] Throughout this treatise he emphasises the nature of 'twoness' as the doubling of One, and the essential importance of 'the second' as the key to all manifestation: the two is united with the One and simultaneously differentiated from It. In other words, this is the degree of the perfect human being, who is the divine Image.

19. *Fut*.II.427–8. We may compare this with the Thursday Eve letter-prayer on the *bāʾ* in his *Awrād*. See Ibn ʿArabī, *The Seven Days of the Heart*, trans. Stephen Hirtenstein and Pablo Beneito (Oxford, 2008), pp. 14–17.

20. *Fut*.I.52, 54, 57–9, 74.

21. A much-copied work, also known as *R. al-Aḥadiyya* (RG 26), written *c*.601H; for example, see Shehit Ali MS. 2813/7, fols. 35a–41a, copied in 621H in Damascus, in the hand of Ayyūb b. Badr al-Muqrī.

22. Ibn ʿArabī appears to have conceived of a whole series of shorter treatises on each letter: see for example, *Kitāb al-Jīm*, also known as *K. al-Qayyūmiyya* (RG 562); *Kitāb al-Dāl*, also known as *K. al-Ḥikma* (RG 234); *Kitāb al-Hāʾ*, also known as *K. al-Ḥayāt* (RG 231); *Kitāb al-Wāw*, also known as *K. al-Khalq wa-l-amr* (RG 234), none of which seem to be extant. In these cases, all that is left is the correlation of the letter and its primary subject matter, as specified in his *Fihrist*, and it is unclear whether they were simply subsumed into the *Futūḥāt*.

POEM[23]

The stayings of the Real taught me spiritual manners –
indeed it is the one with good manners who stays.
He made me witness His Essence face to face[24] –
never did I see Her Sun set.
Our essence is united:[25]
and when I became an ardent lover,
He sent me with [multiple] attributes[26]
so that the intelligent attainer might recognise me.
He takes the inner mystery from my heart,[27]
so [all receiving] hearts will be nourished by
His name.

23. This poem is on the cover page of the holograph Yusuf Ağa MS. 4868, fol. 3a. The poem, which rhymes in 'b' and is attributed to 'the author', can be found in his earlier work, *K. 'Anqā' mughrib* (British Library, OR 9632 fol. 11a, trans. Gerald Elmore in *Islamic Sainthood in the Fullness of Time*, Leiden, 1999, pp 334–5). It appears here to be in the hand of Ibn 'Arabī (cf. Murad Buhari MS 162).

24. Alluding to Moses with whom God spoke 'face to face' (*kifāḥan*), according to a *ḥadīth* (see Lane, *Lexicon*, 2677).

25. Or: 'Our essence (*dhātunā*) became one.' Note the apparent ambiguity and incompatibility of the singular essence (*dhāt*) and the plural pronoun ('our').

26. Ar: *bi-l-ṣifāt*, meaning the many qualities that are inherent in the single essence (*dhāt*) mentioned in the previous line. The *bi-* here could also mean that the sending was 'through' the attributes. The various meanings of the *bā'* are something that the treatise will explain further.

27. Ibn 'Arabī uses three different words for heart in these lines: *sirr* (innermost heart, mystery), *fu'ād* (heart-mind, the burning heart in motion) and *qalb* (the heart that turns and receives).

THE BOOK OF THE LETTER *BĀʾ*

(*Kitāb al-Bāʾ*, Yusuf Ağa MS 4868/2)

TRANSLATION

//3b//[28]

In the name of God, the All-Compassionate, the
Most Merciful.
May blessings and peace be upon the Prophet
Muhammad and his family.
God is the opener of all doors.

A certain person, whose question was highly esteemed by me and whose seeking brought him to me [for an answer], asked me to compose for him a book in my own hand, something that we would compose on the subject of divine realities and spiritual connectivities (*raqāʾiq*). And then he, may God honour him, told me of something that was said to him in the course of a spiritual gathering, when he was taken out of himself. He said that he was called in his innermost heart (*sirr*) [by a voice] from the world of his sacred reality,[29] and he was told in that address in an unveiling of light: 'Things manifest through the *bāʾ*, and the *bāʾ* has a certain matter within it.'[30] He said: 'I was bewildered, since there was no one able to unlock [the meaning of] this riddle. As bewilderment (*ḥayra*) arose in me – and the presence [of God] normally protects itself [from others][31] (*ghayra*) – I was told: "multiply 10 by 10". Then the veil was let down, the address ended, and I was returned with this increase [in knowledge] to the world of the visible.'

28. These numbers in the text indicate the folios of the original manuscript.

29. Ar: *ʿālam qudsih*.

30. Ar: *al-bāʾ fīhā amrun-mā*. This is a very elliptical phrase, which could also be translated as: 'the *bāʾ* has within it a certain mystery/order'. The word *amr* is a vague term that means not only 'order' but 'affair' or 'matter'. As Ibn ʿArabī goes on to explain, one reason for using the word is that the final letter ('n') elides into the following letter ('m') in pronunciation (just as 'certain matter' is pronounced in English).

31. Ar: *ghayra*, literally 'protection', which entails jealously protecting what belongs to Him against all otherness (*ghayr*). Ibn ʿArabī also uses it to make a rhyming pair with 'bewilderment' (*ḥayra*).

When he narrated to us what was said to him in his imaginal world[32] and how he had been addressed from the treasury of his imagination, I wanted to interpret for him these obscure words and raise him up to the level appointed for him in the world of inspiration. And so I say:

Praise be to God through God,[33] since this is better for establishing my essential reality (*ʿaynī*) and making my created being (*kawnī*) continue. In my continuing in being[34] is the manifestation of His authority and the witnessing of His goodness (*iḥsān*). Had it not been for His *bāʾ*, no trace of it would have manifested, and no spirit would have been joined onto mortal man. May God bless Muhammad, father of fathers (*āb al-ābāʾ*), the one who is passionately adored by the *bāʾ*,[35] and his family.

Now, my dear friend, may God let you continue in life, you mentioned to me that you were told that 'things manifest through the *bāʾ* and the *bāʾ* has a certain matter within it', and that you were bewildered by what was said to you. You were also told to multiply 10 by 10. So you should know that //**4a**// in this address the quintessence of divine wisdom has been brought together for you, and has informed you of the ultimate goal. This is that the *bāʾ* is the first existent (*mawjūd*), and occupies the second degree of being (*wujūd*). It is a most eminent letter, for it is Justice and the Truth through which exist the heavens and the earth and all that lies in between.[36] Part of its nobility and dominion in terms of [cosmic]

32. Ar: *ʿālam mithālih*, literally 'the world of his image-making or imagination', the intermediary realm of images between the world of senses and the world of meanings, in which meanings are seen clothed in forms.

33. Ar: *bi-llāh*, which begins with the letter *bāʾ* and is therefore related to the meaning of the letter.

34. Ar: *baqāʾī*, which also begins with the letter *bāʾ*.

35. Ar: *al-mashghūf bi-l-bāʾ*. This phrase can also be understood as 'the one to whom the *bāʾ* is made pleasing'. See Lane, *Lexicon*, p. 1577.

36. This is an allusion to the notion of *al-ḥaqq al-makhlūq bihi l-samāwāt wa-l-arḍ* (the Divine Reality or Truth through Whom the creation of the heavens and the earth takes place) – i.e., a notion used by Ibn Barrajān (d.536/1141) and occupies an important place in the teachings of Muhyī l-Dīn Ibn ʿArabī. He refers to this term in several places in the *Futūḥāt* as well as in other works such as his commentary on *al-Mashāhid al-asrār al-qudsiyya* (*Sharḥ ṣadr al-Mashāhid*, Manisa 1183/7, fol. 85a; see Hülya Küçük, 'Ibn Barrajān's Views and Legacy', pp. 402–3).

rank is that God the Exalted opened His Mighty Book with it, by saying '*bismillāh*'. Thus He began [it] with the *bāʾ*, and all the other *sūra*s also begin with this letter. Even when God wanted to reveal *Sūrat al-Tawba* without the *basmala*, He began it with the letter *bāʾ*, saying *Barāʾatun min Allāh…*[37] So He started [every *sūra*] with the *bāʾ* rather than any other letter. Our shaykh and imam Abū Madyan used to say: 'I do not see anything without seeing the *bāʾ* written on it', as if he was saying about everything: 'Through me everything exists'. The *bāʾ* lies behind everything. The gnostic Abū Bakr al-Shiblī was asked: 'Are you al-Shiblī?' He said: 'No! I am the dot under the *bāʾ*". He was alluding to the fact that just as the dot points to the [letter] *bāʾ* and distinguishes it from other letters such as *tāʾ* and *thāʾ*, I point to the Cause by which I came into existence and from which I am born, through which I am manifest and in which I am hidden.[38] These two great shaykhs [al-Shiblī and Abū Madyan], who are just witnesses[39], have testified for you to the supreme eminence of this letter and its grandeur above all other letters. And I, if God wills, will explain about it to you as regards what the state of the dream involved and what was revealed to you about it 'on the nearer bank'.[40]

37. Q.9:1. 'Immunity from God [and His Messenger towards those of the polytheists with whom you [believers] have made a covenant].'

38. It is noteworthy that the only time the preposition *bi-* (translated here as 'through') is used in this list is with the word 'manifest', alluding to the fact that the *bāʾ* is a letter of the manifest realm, as Ibn ʿArabī goes on to explain in the next paragraph.

39. Ar: *shāhidān ʿadlān*. It is worth noting that both these terms are actually divine Names. They suggest that the two masters al-Shiblī and Abū Madyan favoured what is right and true, for the sake of Truth alone, not for themselves, and because they give whoever and whatever has a right the right that is properly theirs, their testimony in the words quoted is reliable. They could be called 'trustworthy witnesses', but that is really a consequence of the condition of adopting these divine Names, from the point of view of others. This phrase also echoes the earlier mention of the *bāʾ* as Justice (*ʿadl*) and Truth (*ḥaqq*).

40. Q.8:42. The Arabic phrase *al-ʿudwa al-dunyā* literally means a closer place of elevation, but in the Quranic context it refers to a historical event involving the caravan of Abū Sufyān: 'When you were on the nearer side of the valley and they were on the further…'. However, Ibn ʿArabī is clearly extending its meaning into a Sufi context, as with other key terms in the Quranic verse such as *amr* (matter) and *bayyina* (clear proof).

Now, the *bā'* is a letter of coming together and uniting,[41] and it is from the visible and manifest realm. Among the degrees it has the second place,[42] and it is a voiced letter. It shares a common feature with the Arabic letter *mīm*, which is why you were told: '*wa-l-bā' fīh amrun(m)*[43]*-mā*' ('There is a certain matter within the *bā'*'). The letter *mīm* is also a letter of connecting, and is also from the visible and manifest realm and has the second [level] among the degrees of the even.[44] However, it differs from the *bā'* by being voiceless,[45] and pronunciation causes it to be doubled. This doubling necessitates another letter here, which is the letter *nūn* in the word *amrun*: this turns into a *mīm* and **//4b//** strengthens the *mīm* in '*-mā*'. This is the station in which it is said [by al-Ḥallāj]: 'I am the one whom I love, and the one whom I love is me'. When Junayd was asked about this station, he said:

> He sang to me of my heart's desires, and I sang to
> him as he sang
> We are where they were, and they are where we were

Another one[46] said of this [station]: 'I am the Truth' (*anā l-ḥaqq*). And God said [in a divine *ḥadīth*]: 'I become his hearing and seeing…'[47]

41. Ar: *ittiṣāl wa-wuṣla*. As a preposition or particle, *bā'* in the form of *bi-* indicates connection, association and adhesion.

42. This refers to the numerical value of the letter *bā'* as 2.

43. In accordance with certain recitation rules applied to the Quran, the *nūn* is here pronounced as a *mīm*, that is, it turns into a *mīm*. This rule is called *al-iqlāb* (turning into another, elision) in Arabic.

44. This refers to the numerical value of *mīm* as 40, i.e. 4 (an even number) in the second column ('level') of tens.

45. The word Ibn 'Arabī uses here (*mahmūs*) means voiceless in modern phonetics (i.e. the vocal chords do not vibrate when the letter is sounded), but literally means speaking softly or whispering inaudibly to others. Whereas 'm' would be regarded as a voiced consonant in the modern sense, he means that it is uttered without a vowel sound (as in humming), in contrast to 'b', which requires a vowel voiced on the breath.

46. Referring to al-Ḥallāj.

47. This is part of the famous divine saying (*ḥadīth qudsī*): 'Whoever treats a friend of Mine as an enemy, on him I declare war. My servant draws near to Me by nothing dearer to Me than that which I have established as a duty for him. And My servant does not cease to approach Me through supererogatory acts until I love him. And when I love him I become his hearing with which he hears, his sight with which he sees, his hand with which he grasps and his foot with which he walks…'

In this case, two persons[48] become one person in essential reality,[49] as if they are one person in pronunciation. Had there been no doubling sign [on these letters], no one would know that they were two different persons, as they are like one person in the visible world. We know for certain that nothing but God can make the dead come to life, and then we see the same thing when Jesus blew into a bird, and it became a [living] bird.[50] There is only one person to be seen in the visible realm, and that is Jesus. However, his action produces an effect indicating that there must be another from whom such an action has come. So we have two 'persons'. Thus, the doubling that manifests in the pronunciation of a letter is like the effect, and reason dictates that there must be someone other than what we witness [with the senses].

There was also information through the doubling of the *mīm* in this unveiling about what the people of intoxication maintain about unification[51] [with God]. The relationship of the eliding *nūn* with the *mīm* is a very close one, since the *nūn* is from the voiceless realm just like the *mīm*, and it has the rank of 5: in the alphanumeric system it signifies 50 in the tens column, which is the second level of odd numbers, just as the *mīm* is the second level of even numbers, and has the rank of 4, and 40 in the tens column. In numerical terms it has the property of being next, and this is why it (*nūn*) elides with the *mīm* and becomes hidden within it.[52]

See al-Bukhārī, *Riqāq*, 38; Ibn ʿArabī, *Divine Sayings* (*Mishkāt al-anwār*), trans. Stephen Hirtenstein and Martin Notcutt (Oxford, 2008), p. 70.

48. Ar: *dhātayn*, an ambiguous word that can mean 'essence' or 'self'.

49. Ar: *fī al-ʿayn*, another ambiguous phrase which can mean 'source' and 'actuality'.

50. See Q.5:110, '… when you were creating from clay [shapes] like those of birds by My permission, and blowing into them, and they became birds…' This is discussed in more detail in the Chapter on Jesus in the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*.

51. Ar: *ittiḥād*, which Ibn ʿArabī defines as 'two essences becoming one, whether servant or Lord… There can be no *ittiḥād* other than with respect to number and nature' (*Fut*.II.130). For an analysis of Ibn ʿArabī's complex perspective, see Ibn ʿArabī, *The Universal Tree and the Four Birds* (*Risālat al-ittiḥād al-kawnī*), trans. and commentary by Angela Jaffray (Oxford, 2006), pp. 53–8). The reference to 'people of intoxication' here is to those lovers of God who misunderstand the true nature of unification and of the self, and claim to be united with God in the sense of incarnation (*ḥulūl*).

52. In exactly the same way, the number 5 is hidden or implicit in the number 4. Working backwards towards 1, we could even say that the number 5 elides with

The *nūn* is [also] similar to the *bā'* in terms of **//5a//** the secondary level, and in this it is much more similar to the *bā'* than to the *mīm*. The *bā'* is the second in oneness (*waḥdāniyya*), while the *nūn* is second in singularity (*fardāniyya*): the single[53] is closer to oneness and oddness than the one of a pair is. So it is like it.[54] Therefore, it is quite possible that the *nūn* elides with the *mīm* because of its likeness to it in terms of uniqueness (*aḥadiyya*). Each of these three letters are consigned the special characteristics possessed by the other. This is because the *bā'* is characterised by firstness: no other [letter] can have this station, for the *bā'* has the second rank in relation to the being of its Creator, and it is impossible for it to be prior to its Creator. So being first [after its Creator] remains [as its particular characteristic], and then the numbers proliferate from it. The 1 is not a number, and it is only after the arrival of the *bā'*, which is at the second level of existence, that the existence of numbers appears.

The particular feature of the *mīm* is that its first letter has a sympathetic inclining[55] towards its last letter, just as is the case with the

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or inserts itself (*mudghim*) into the number 4.

53. It should be borne in mind that in the world of numbers the word *fard* ('single/singular') refers to both the first one of a pair and the odd number, which is viewed as standing alone, and is also used to describe a unique prime number (i.e. a number only divisible by itself and 1). Hence in Arabic there is a direct correspondence between 'singularity', 'oddness' (*witriyya*) and 'primeness'. This distinguishes the primal singularity of *fard* from the idea of being one of a pair (*zawj*), like Adam is in relation to Eve. As Ibn ʿArabī explains elsewhere in the Chapter of Muhammad in the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 'singularity' is the specific quality of Muhammad as 'the most perfect and complete existent amongst this humankind' (*Fuṣūṣ*, Arabic edn. p. 202).

54. Ar: *innahu ka-huwa*, which could be understood as 'he (the single) is like Him (the unique)'. In this reading there is an allusion to the Quranic phrase 'there is nothing like His likeness' (*laysa ka-mithlihi shay'un*, 42:11), where God's Likeness indicates the perfect human being as symbolised by the Tree – see *The Universal Tree*, pp. 82–3.

55. Ar: *munʿaṭaf*. While at first sight the first letter is 'the same' as the last in these three letters, here Ibn ʿArabī uses a term that suggests that the two letters lovingly incline and bend towards each other, like the two sides of a valley or a garment folded into two – they are two separate letters which conjoin in sympathetic affection. For the use of a similar term among earlier Sufi writers, see al-Daylamī, *ʿAṭf al-alif al-ma'lūf*, trans. Joseph Norment Bell et al. as *A Treatise on Mystical Love* (Edinburgh, 2005).

wāw and the *nūn*, and so in this respect it resembles the *nūn*: we have already mentioned the wisdom of this sympathetic conjunction and circularity in the *Kitāb Sitta wa-tisʿīn*,[56] in which we have spoken about the *wāw*, the *nūn* and the *mīm* in particular. At the same time, what is special to the *mīm* is a degree of pairing,[57] [a characteristic] which no other [letter] is given. One of the distinctive features of the above-mentioned *nūn* is that it is from the realm of breaths and perfumes, so it has a [special] way in the nasal passages, which no other letters can use. It is a most noble letter.

Note that the *bāʾ* is voiced[58] from the realm of revealing, because it is the origin of manifestation //**5b**// and it is the garment that is on its Creator. Therefore, it is brought out in His image and through His word, and He becomes concealed by its manifestation. The knowledge of those who know[59] can only come through the *bāʾ*; the eyes of those who contemplate can only see through the *bāʾ*; those who realise can only come to realisation through the *bāʾ*. It is everything, it is manifest in everything, and it pervades everything. Through it, everything audible becomes audible. Its unseen [inaudible] aspect is its Creator. And hence it is from the voiced/revealing realm. The *mīm* and the *nūn* are from the voiceless/hidden realm due to the *bāʾ*; they manifest in the reality[60] because of the *bāʾ*. In fact they both [manifest] because of the unseen aspect of the *bāʾ*, which is the [degree of the] most sublime permission, and the order that must be obeyed. Therefore they are related to [the unseen aspect], not to the *bāʾ*, and because of this relationship they are from the voiceless realm, which is concealed.

They all share the feature of being letters of coming together and uniting. Thus, in the case of the *bāʾ* and the *mīm*, the lips are

56. Also known as the *Kitāb al-Mīm wa-l-wāw wa-l-nūn* (RG 462). The title 96 derives from the *abjad* combination of the three letters which are discussed in the treatise (m/50 + w/6 + n/40 = 96).

57. The word 'pairing' (*shafʿiyya*) here seems to refer to a special linking of the first and last, just as in the case of the prophets, where the first letter of the last prophet Muhammad is lovingly inclined to the last letter of the first prophet Adam (see the original holograph, Veliyuddin MS 1759, *K. al-Mīm*, fol. 20a-b).

58. Ar: *majhūr*, which also means becoming apparent, visible, audible, and being revealed.

59. Ar: *maʿrifat al-ʿārifīn*, meaning direct experiential knowledge.

60. Ar: *al-ʿayn*. That is, they are manifest in the unseen aspect of reality.

brought together after having separated from each other. This is what happens when lovers meet: it is called *ittiṣāl* when they come together, and *wuṣla* when they embrace each other. The *nūn* is also a letter of coming together and uniting, since the tongue and upper palate come together when it is pronounced. However, there is a difference between the two coming togethers: the coming together of the *nūn* is in the intermediary realm,[61] that is, the high spiritual world of similitude (*mithāl*) and imagination (*khayāl*), while the coming together of the *bā'* or the *mīm* is in the visible world (*shahāda*), although it is more subtle by virtue of being [in reality] closer to the spiritual and invisible world – and that is more complete because it comes from being a [divine] deputy (*nā'ib*) and vicegerent (*khalīfa*).[62] *And there is not one of us* //**6a**// *that does not have a known station*.[63]

When the one that received the unveiling became bewildered about this matter and did not recognise [what it meant], he was told in the address to 'multiply 10 by 10' – which of course means the number 100 – pointing at the number 10 and none of the other numbers. Now know that 10 by 10 here means multiplication, from which comes a single conclusion, i.e. 100, which is in the hundreds column, 1 in the ones and 10 in the tens. So the similarity between the numbers 1, 10 and 100 becomes the same, since 1 is the head of the ones, 10 is the head of the tens, and 100 is the head of the hundreds. There is no cessation of oneness (*waḥdāniyya*), and yet it arises from two, just as [oneness] takes precedence in the two persons in the *mīm* and the elision of the *nūn*, as we have mentioned. Thus the phrase 'multiply 10 by 10' becomes a clarification of what he was told about the *bā'* and the doubling of the *mīm*, and he was bewildered by it. For example, when you say 'multiply 1 by 1', there are two 1s and you multiply one of them by the other, and you still get 1. This resulting 1 is not the bare 1 [you had at the beginning], but it is a conclusion differentiated from the [first] 1. Similarly, when you multiply 10 by 10, you get one 100. So 10 becomes a way of explaining the *bā'*.

61. As symbolised by taking place within the mouth.

62. This is an allusion to the human as being last in manifestation but first in divine intention.

63. Q.37:164.

Then know that what is really meant by 'multiply 10 by 10' is like saying 'multiply your essence by the essence of your Creator, since you are created in His image'. The human image becomes existent from 10, for the unseen Essence is imaged as 10. When you multiply your essence by His essence by way of tenness, you get 100.[64] **//6b//** When the result of this multiplication is in the world of the senses, this 100 is you, not He – this is the ranks of paradise with its hundred levels. On the other hand, if the result of this multiplication is in the world of the Unseen, this 100 is He, not you – and this is the degrees of the 99 divine Names, the remaining 1 of this 100 being the portion that is invisible to created beings in the world of words. Each Name has a rank in paradise, and the ranks [also] belong to you because you are the one ascending in them. The Names belong to Him, because they are what affect and establish these levels. Here it has been made clear to you what was meant by the 10, rather than any other number.

There is also another mystery, which is that there are four degrees of numbers: the first is the ones, the second the tens, the third the hundreds and the fourth is the thousands; and there is no fifth at all.[65] 10 is the second of these degrees. And as you know, the *bāʾ* is also [second], since it follows the *alif* [the first letter of the alphabet]. This [equivalence] is why, when you were bewildered by the *bāʾ*, it was replaced [in the address] by the 10. Each of them, the *bāʾ* and the 10 which can be substituted for it, have a share in firstness, on the one hand, and in secondness, on the other. You can utilise them however you wish; there is nothing preventing you [from using them interchangeably]. This is how the reality of what was addressed to you has been clarified for you.

Now let us discuss the existence of the multiple things that [only] manifest from the *bāʾ*, not from anything else. With regard to the

64. We may note that 100 is the numerical value of the letter *qāf*, which is sometimes used as an alternative title for this treatise.

65. Ar: *aṣlan*, literally 'by origin'. To all intents and purposes this is correct, since numbers above the thousands are counted in ten or hundred thousands. What modern people call 'a million' was well known as a concept, but it was known to the Arabs only as a thousand thousand (unlike other cultures and languages such as ancient Sanskrit, which had separate words for million, billion, ten billion and so on).

bā' there is a claim that its sign always remains[66] (*baqā'*), since it is not subject to passing away like the *lām*. This is why we speak [in grammar] of 'the assisting *bā'*'.[67] It is the same with 'partition' (*tabʿīḍ*) and 'adhesion' (*ilṣāq*);[68] and the *bā'* can be part of an adverb, in which case it is redundant.[69]

//7**a**// The *bā'* has manifold functions, all of which give the meaning of 'remaining' (*baqā'*), which alludes to the destination.[70] You say: 'I give praise to God through God' – so you affirm yourself as one who praises, although you are incapable of fulfilling this praise as it should be given, so you do it by asking for assistance [from God]. Also, you say: 'I wrote with a pen' – so you affirm yourself as a writer, and yet you are assisted in this by the pen. This is why the Exalted One says: *[Your Lord is the Most Generous] Who taught by the pen*.[71] He taught all created beings by the pen, and that is Justice and the Truth by which the heavens and the earth came into being, which is the First Intellect, and the Muhammadian Reality, and it is also the *bā'*. When you say that all things appeared by means of Truth, this is the same as saying that all things appeared by means of the *bā'*, because the *bā'* is a name for this intelligible Reality, just as all the things we have mentioned – Pen, Truth, Justice and Intellect – are also names for this Reality, whose name is *bā'*. Its

66. Ar: *baqā' al-rasm*, an elliptical phrase which literally means 'the remaining of the mark/definition'.

67. The *bā' al-istiʿāna* is a grammatical term to describe how the *bā'* indicates the instrument that helps you to do something: for example, *katabtu bi-qalami* means 'I wrote with a pen'. See *al-Munjid fī l-lugha wa-l-aʿlām* (Beirut, 1987), p. 24. This lies behind saying *bismillāh*, literally 'by means of/through the Name of God'.

68. These are two further grammatical terms used in connection with the *bā'*, which Ibn 'Arabī goes on to discuss in more detail. 'Partition' refers to the use of *bi-* to indicate part (*baʿḍ*), not the whole (*kull*), of the following noun, while 'adhesion' means the way the *bā'* adheres to a following noun (e.g. *bi-qalam*, 'with a pen'). See *al-Munjid*, p. 24.

69. For example, *bi-surʿa* meaning 'quickly'; it also introduces the nominal predicate in negative or interrogative sentences, such as *alaysa Allāhu bi-aḥkam al-ḥākimīn* (Q.95:8).

70. Ar: *al-maḥajja*, meaning 'the goal of a journey', particularly a pilgrimage, or 'the road to the destination'. Some MSS. read *al-maḥabba*, 'love'.

71. Q.96:4. The following verse adds: 'He taught the human being what he did not know', which according to this akbarian commentary is an additional divine teaching to that which is given to all created beings.

most beautiful name is the *bāʾ*, in terms of the fact that all things appeared by means of it, and because the *bāʾ* gives the meaning of adhesion. For instance, you say 'I passed by the mosque' (*marartu bi-l-masjid*), in the sense of 'I joined my passing with the mosque'.

All things manifest through the *bāʾ*, because He is One and only one can emerge from Him, and this is verifiably true.[72] The *bāʾ* is the first of the things to originate from Him. In fact it is really an *alif*, single in respect of its essence, and it is a *bāʾ* in respect of it manifesting in the second degree of being. This is why it is called a *bāʾ* so that it can be distinguished from [the *alif*]. The name *alif* remains for it and for its manifestation. We affirm that it is a voiced letter (*majhūr*), which means 'becoming conspicuous',[73] and this is manifestation. Given that it is in the second degree, and the number 1 cannot be deemed a number, whereas the number 2 can, and the *bāʾ* is two in terms of rank, then it is a number and things //7**b**// are also a number. Therefore a number originates from a number, and that is the *bāʾ*. The One and Only (*al-wāḥid al-aḥad*) remains in Its uniqueness, sanctified and transcendent [of all number]. However, there is a point to note here, which is that it is called a *bāʾ* because of the [word] *bāh*. The letter *hāʾ* [the final letter in *bāh*] changes into a *hamza* [the final letter in *bāʾ*] as a symbolic sign – this can often occur frequently in speech, since the *hamza* is the brother of

72. Ar: *fa-innahu al-wāḥid wa-lā yasḍuru ʿanhu illā wāḥid*, quoting Ibn Rushd, who states the same position as Ibn ʿArabī in his 'Epitome' (*Talkhīṣ mā baʿd al-Ṭabīʿa*, ed. 'Uthmān Amīn, Cairo, 1958, trans. Rüdiger Arnzen as *Averroes on Aristotle's Metaphysics*, Berlin, 2010) that 'the truth is that from the one only one can emerge, and from the dual (2) only the dual and then what is below [duality] can emerge' (Arabic, p. 153, trans. with note, p. 168). The phrase here can also be translated as: 'it is the one, and nothing can emerge from it but one'. This refers to the famous doctrine of Plotinus, that out of the One can come only one 'thing', which he called Intellect; this Intellect, which is 'second', is itself inherently multiple, and from it all things come. This Plotinian principle was articulated by al-Kindī (d.*c.*252/866) as '[the intellect] is the beginning of that which is multiple, and it is united in a certain way since it is whole' (*On First Philosophy*: *al-Kindī's Metaphysics*, trans. Alfred Ivry, Albany, NY, 1974, p. 107), and came to be a subject of much debate among later Islamic philosophers and theologians such as Ibn Sīnā (see his *Tafsīr Sūrat al-ikhlāṣ*, ed. Ḥasan ʿĀṣī as *al-Tafsīr al-Qurʾānī*, Beirut, 1983, p. 107).

73. Ar: *jahr*. The root *j-h-r* means 'to appear or become conspicuous' in the sense of being audible or visible. *Majhūr* literally means loud enough to be heard.

the *hā'*, and they replace each other in the speech of certain Arabs. *Bā'* in Arabic signifies 'union', as does *bāh*.[74] So the *bā'*, which is actually without a *hā'*, is union. The *hā'* appears in the other word, as an allusion in the eyes of the people of symbolic allusion[75] to the fact that *hā'* is *bā'* and *bā'* is *hā'*. Hence they say *bāh* as if they are saying the *bā'* is He, or He is the *bā'*.[76]

Since ephemeral existence[77] is a conclusion, there must be two fundamental premises,[78] and each of these two premises is united to the other: this 'uniting' is a connecting link between these two premises, and it is from this that the conclusion appears. In the same way, when the Real turned towards the *bā'*, which is the second being, it received His Face and from it the shadow of created being was extended. The Exalted One says: *Do you see not how your Lord extended the shadow?*[79] Thus, the world was extended from the *bā'* when it met with the Real, just as a shadow extends from an object when it meets the sun. And as the shadow of a thing is according to the form it extends from, so the universe arises according to the form of the *bā'*. This is why the one who knows[80] said: 'I did not see anything that did not have the *bā'* written upon it'. This means that he saw the form or image of the *bā'* in everything that came from it, since everything is its shadow and it permeates everything.

74. The word *bā'* (with a hamza), sometimes written as *bā'a*(*h*), means 'marriage' or 'sexual union' (*nikāḥ*), as does *bāh*. See Lane, *Lexicon*, pp. 272 and 278.

75. Ar: *ahl al-ishārāt*, an expression that Ibn ʿArabī uses for those who interpret things as symbols of realities. See *Fut*.IV.300.

76. This rather allusive exposition is designed to show that the Perfect Human (symbolised by the *bā'*) is not only the divine Image but is the same as Him. According to his *Ijāza* (no. 109) Ibn ʿArabī specifies that he wrote a work which he called '*K. Fā'-Alif,* which is *Kitāb al-Bāh* as it is alluding to propagation and sexual reproduction'. The letters *fā'* (80, which to fit the code in his *Ijāza* should probably be amended to *qāf*, 100, a number also associated with *bā'*) and *alif* (1) may be some kind of numerical code for this principle. For the pleasure of the *bāh*, see the poem at beginning of the section on the double divine Name *al-wāḥid al-aḥad* in *Fut*.IV.293.

77. Ar: *ḥādith*.

78. Ar: *aṣlayn*, literally 'two origins/roots'. Here Ibn ʿArabī is using the terminology of deductive reasoning, with two premises 'uniting' to make a conclusion. For example, in its simplest form: premise (a) all men are mortal; premise (b) Socrates is a man; therefore conclusion (c) Socrates is mortal.

79. Q.25:45.

80. Ar: *al-ʿārif*, meaning Abū Madyan. The saying was quoted earlier.

This is why God the Exalted states that shadows prostrate themselves to Him, *in the mornings and the evenings*:[81] the origin [of this coming and going] is the inclination of the sun and the appearance of shadow. Since light //**8a**// surrounds you on all sides – which is the definition of 'standing erect'[82] – your shadow is subsumed in your light, just like the created world is annihilated in the manifesting of Reality, so that no trace of it remains in whatever place[83] you are in. If it is at the place of remembering (*dhikr*), the created being is annihilated from remembrance. If it is at the place of contemplating (*mushāhada*), it is annihilated in contemplation. What is meant is that the created has no manifestation at all when Reality reveals Itself. His only manifestation is through the *bāʾ*, since the *bāʾ* is His garment, and the universe becomes hidden within [the *bāʾ*] and [the *bāʾ*] is hidden within the Real. So [the world] is [the *bāʾ*'s] garment: the universe can be cast off from it, but it cannot be cast off from the universe, just as it cannot be cast off from the ipseity of its Creator.

Someone sneezed when he was in the presence of al-Junayd, and said '*al-ḥamdu lillāh*' ('thanks be to God'). Al-Junayd reminded him to complete the sentence as God says [in the *Fātiḥa*] '*rabb al-ʿālamīn*' ('Lord of all created beings'). The man asked: 'O our master! What is a created being that it can be mentioned along with God?' Al-Junayd replied: 'Now you can say it, my brother. When the ephemeral is joined to the eternal, no trace of it remains.'[84] The

81. Ar: *bi-l-ghuduww wa-l-aṣāl*, with the *bi-* used as a time particle. This refers to: 'All those who are in the heavens and the earth prostrate themselves to God, willingly or unwillingly, [as do] their shadows, in the mornings and the evenings' (Q.13:15). See also: 'Have they not looked at all things God has created, whose shadows incline themselves to the right and to the left, in prostration to God and lowly?' (Q.16:48).

82. Ar: *al-istiwā*, referring to Q.53:6 ('he stood erect when he was on the highest horizon'). Some MSS. read *al-istiwāʾ*, referring to 'The All-Compassionate is seated on the Throne' (Q.20:5), which would mean that being seated on the Throne encompasses the whole of existence.

83. Ar: *maqām*, literally 'a place of standing'.

84. In other words, by mentioning created beings (or universes, *ʿālamīn*) in the same breath as God, the one is annihilated in the other. This conversation is also quoted in the commentary on the idea of 'two opposites' in poem XX in the *Tarjumān al-ashwāq* (see Nicholson edn., p. 90).

spiritual dimension of asking for aid[85] is that the created being is based on that[86] – *there is no changing the words of God*[87] – just as woodwork cannot be imagined without there being a joiner and a cutting tool.[88]

The second degree is a real matter. It is absolutely necessary, and nothing else will do, just as 3 can never precede 2, nor can 4 precede 3. Thus, when 1 wants to manifest the reality of 3, it has to have the help of 2. If the reality of 2 did not exist, then 1 would remain as it is, incapable of bringing 3 into existence without 2. This is the spiritual meaning of assistance in the *bā'*. The dot [under it] was made a pointer to this, **//8b//** because its form and the form of its shadow can become confused. As a result, the created being imagines that he (or she) exists by himself, and does not recognise that he is [actually] a shadow. When the shadow of the *bā'* is included in the *bā'*, it becomes clear to him that he is not included in the dot as something 'extra', but that [in reality] he is the *bā'* to which the dot is [simply] an indicator. The dot is the beginning of the line[89] and the originator of everything. This [dot] was given to the *bā'*, because the *bā'* was the first originator. It was placed below [the line of the *bā'*], because the created world originated from the *bā'*, and therefore appears below in comparison to the place/station of the *bā'*. Thus, the dot comes into existence between the *bā'* and the created world. The dot is the essence of affirming Unity,[90] since it is the start of the line and thus the reality of the created being (*mawjūd*). Thus affirming/realising Unity became a protective wall between the world and the *bā'*, preventing the *bā'* from making claims [to be God] and preventing the universe from making

85. Referring to the fifth verse of the *Fātiḥa*: 'It is You whom we worship and adore, You whom we ask for aid.'

86. Ar: *mawqūf ʿalayhā*. The Arabic is quite ambiguous here: it could mean that the created being is based on dependence and asking; or that the created being is dependent on the letter *bā'*.

87. Q.10:64.

88. Ar: *qadūm*, literally an adze, but it means any tool with a sharp cutting edge. The point is that two principles are necessary to account for woodwork (created world): the craftsman (God) and the tool he uses (the perfect human).

89. Ar: *rā'is al-khaṭṭ*, literally 'at the head of the line'. The dot is also the principle of all lines or script, since all letters are made up of 'dots' joined together.

90. Ar: *ʿayn al-tawḥīd*, which can also mean 'the same as affirming Unity'.

partners [to God]. In this way [affirming] Unity remains impeccable in creation, for all things manifest through the *bāʾ*, and there is nothing that the *bāʾ* is not present with, and there is nothing that the dot of the *bāʾ* is not in. This is why it is said: 'In everything there is a sign indicating that He is One'. This 'sign' is the dot under the *bāʾ*, which indicates the affirming of Unity and its summit. This is why this same author[91] said:

'How strange it is that someone can
disobey his God or an unbeliever can reject Him,
when in every movement and stillness[92] God has a
way-mark for witnessing,
and in everything He has a sign indicating that
He is One!'

He asks how He can be rejected by an unbeliever, given that it, meaning the dot, is [always] manifest when the created being looks at the *bāʾ* from which he comes. He only sees Him through the dot, and He only brings him into being through the dot. **//9a//** This is the dot of permission [that is meant] in God's word to Jesus, peace be upon him: 'and you were bringing forth the dead by My permission.'[93] If it had not been for this dot, the *bāʾ* could not have left any visible trace in the world – and this is expressed in the Exalted One's word: 'I become his hand and support' in the *ḥadīth* in which He says; 'I become his hearing…'.[94] Therefore, it is not possible to reject its being nor is it possible to disobey it due to its Self-disclosure, for it is the mark of the witness which belongs to Him in every movement and non-movement, testifying for Him through the trace of oneness. The *bāʾ* is what the realities require, and it is absolutely necessary. It is with the dot, just as you [as created being] are with the dot.

91. These three verses are by the ʿAbbasid poet Abū al-ʿAtāhiya (d.213/828), and the last line is much quoted by Ibn ʿArabī. For the whole 5-verse poem, see *Dīwān Abū al-ʿAtāhiya* (Beirut, 1406/1986), p. 122, which has a different last but one line.

92. This can also refer to the vocalisation ('movement') and non-vocalisation ('stillness') of letters.

93. Q.5:110.

94. See al-Bukhārī, *Riqāq*, 38.

As regards the spiritual dimension of the feature of adhesion in the *bā'*, the meaning of *ilṣāq* is that an effect 'adheres' to that which caused it to come into existence. So you say: '*marartu bi-l-masjid*' ('I passed by the mosque'), and you make your passing adhere to the mosque [through the preposition *bi-*]. Likewise, you say: '*dhahaba-llāhu bi-nūrihim*' ('Allāh takes away their light'),[95] making the disappearing[96] adhere to light – and here light is the *bā'*, which [in fact] is the light of the heavens and the earth, because it is the Real that is established in existence (*qāma*). The meaning of *qāma* here is 'manifesting in its reality (*'ayn*) and being established in it'. Therefore we came to exist from Him through the light[97] of His manifesting. Since this intelligible spiritual adhesion [to Reality] exists within it, it was called *bā'* because the *bā'* bestows adhesion [of the verb to the noun].

As regards the spiritual dimension of the adverbial particle[98] within it, this is because it can take the place of *fī*,[99] which is one of the most extraordinary letters. For example, you can say '*nazaltu bi-mawḍi'in kadhā*' in the sense of '*fī mawḍi'in kadhā*' ('I landed in such a place'). The *bā'* in this case is an adverbial particle, since it substitutes for *fī*. So being an adverbial particle is an authentic feature for the *bā'*. We came into existence from its power. We were existent in it prior to our existence in our essences (*a'yān*). For things have four degrees in Being, **//9b//** of which this is one. It is Being in mentation,[100] and because of this we say: we were in the knowledge of God prior to the existence of our essences. We

95. An allusion to Q.2:17 ('The parallel to them is that of those who light a fire, and when it lights up all around them, God takes away their light and leaves them in darkness, unable to see').

96. Ar: *dhahāb*. Like many Arabic verbs, *dh-h-b* has both intransitive (going away, disappearing) and transitive (taking away) meanings. When it is used transitively, it usually takes the preposition *bi-*, which in this explanation 'adheres' to the following noun. Otherwise, the phrase would be understood intransitively as 'God leaves with their light'.

97. Ar: *bi-l-nūr*, which can also mean 'with the light'.

98. Ar: *ẓarf*, an adverbial particle of place or time (not manner). The following examples are all of this kind.

99. Ar: *fā' al-yā'*, literally 'the *fā'* of the *yā'*', meaning the kind of *fā'* which is followed by *yā'*, i.e. the preposition *fī*, which means 'in'.

100. Ar: *dhihn*.

were insofar as[101] He knew us. And being a particle here was [in its] real [meaning, not metaphorical]. This became clear when the world was detached from the *bāʾ* and its inclusion within it, when it was surrounded by light in its standing erect through the *bāʾ*, as in the verse: *Do you see not how your Lord extended the shadow?*[102] Extending and unfolding can only occur in something that has previously been rolled up and contracted.[103] So it was enclosed within the essence of the *bāʾ*. God says [about the movements of the shadows]: *in the mornings and the evenings*[104] because of their inclination [towards Him]. Through all these examples, the *bāʾ* as an adverbial particle has been clarified.

Part of what we have discussed regarding the *fī* and the eminence of being an adverbial particle is the following: I was in Bijāya (Bougie) in Ramadan in the year 597. One night I had a vision in which I was married to all the stars in the sky, all of them one by one.[105] No star remained in heaven that I was not united to with a great spiritual joy. After my marriage to the stars was completed, I was presented with the letters [of the Arabic alphabet], and I was married to all of them in their separateness as well as in their joining.[106] The letter *fī*, which is the *fāʾ* of the *yāʾ* as an adverbial particle, was presented to me as a person, and in it I was given a divine secret pointing to its eminence and the grandeur that God has placed within it.

This vision of mine was related to a man of knowledge who could understand and interpret dreams. I told the person who was going to narrate it to him not to mention me to him [by name]. When the dream was narrated to him, he regarded it as extremely important and said: 'This is such a deep ocean that even the one who had this dream will be unable to plumb its full depths: he will have opened for him the highest knowledges, the sciences of the

101. Ar: *bi-ḥaythu*, another use of the *bāʾ*.

102. Q.25:45.

103. Ar: *maṭwī maqbūḍ*. For example, when in English we speak of something 'unfolding', we are implying that it had been enfolded prior to this.

104. Another example of the *bāʾ* as a time particle – see note 70 above.

105. The word Ibn 'Arabī uses for 'marriage' (*nikāḥ*) in this context also suggests a sexual union.

106. Each Arabic letter has a form in its own right as a separate letter and an abridged form when it is joined to other letters.

secrets of the stars **//10a//** and the special properties of the letters, which none of the people of his time can grasp.' He fell silent for a while and then he said: 'If the person who had this dream is actually in this city, it must be this young man who attained it', and he mentioned my name. My companion was utterly astonished. Then the man of knowledge said: 'It must be him, so don't try and hide his case from me.' My companion said: 'Yes, he is the one who had this dream.' The man said: 'No one else in this time would be up to it apart from him. Perhaps you could take me to him so that I can greet him?' My companion replied: 'I'm afraid I cannot do so unless I have his permission.' He [returned to me and] asked if he could bring him to me, but I [refused and] told him not to go back to him. Then I left the city and never met him. We have recounted this story here because of the adverbial *fā'*, which is one of the most amazing letters.

The property of assistance in it – I mean the *bā'* – has now been elucidated, as has the property of adhesion and the adverbial particle. What remains is the property of partition (*tabʿīḍ*), and this is because, although the Essence is one, it has two intelligible faces: one is the Unseen, and one is the Visible; one is the Exterior, and one the Interior; one is the First, and one the Last; one is the garment, and one the person who wears it.[107] It is correct to say that the Unseen is a part (*baʿḍ*) of the Essence, since the Essence unveiled Itself as a result of its visibility, not because of its invisibility. I knew It as a result of It being unseen, not because It is visible. Therefore it is possible to say: 'I saw Zayd, all of him', and with the word 'all' you affirm that it is also possible to see a part of him. When someone is told of one meaning regarding a certain thing[108] that encompasses two meanings, he cannot see anything but the aspect/face that indicates the meaning which is visible to him, while the other meaning remains invisible to him. The [other] face that belongs to this thing and indicates that invisible meaning is unseen by him. **//10b//** Consequently this viewer can only observe a part

107. Ar: *ridā'* and *murtad*, referring to the upper garment worn by the Prophet.

108. Ar: *dhāt*, which is indefinite here and seems to have the general meaning of 'thing', although it can also be understood as 'person' or 'essence'.

of the thing/Essence. This is why al-Shāfiʿī[109] regards wiping part of the head [as permissible] with regard to ablution,[110] because of the partitioning that is in the *bāʾ*.

When you say: 'It is through the *bāʾ* that things manifest', nonetheless in reality they manifest through God when this *bāʾ* comes into existence. This is like the life that came into the birds of Jesus by the permission [of God] when Jesus, peace be upon him, blew [into them]. Thus, the *bāʾ* became a part for Him[111] when things became manifest, and He became a part for it specifically through this property. This resemblance [between God and human] is the spiritual dimension of divine partitioning which manifests in the *bāʾ*. In the same way, when the created world was detached from the *bāʾ*, it became perfectly feasible for the term 'partitioning' to be applied to them both. For shadows are like 'part' of the person or thing from whom they originate. So realise this very great eminence that belongs to the *bāʾ*!

Its level as something additional[112] is very obvious. This is because it is not possible to be one that is effected by two effective causes. But it is not impossible, according to us, for there to be something that is enabled by two 'enablers',[113] since eternal ability

109. The Egyptian Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Shāfiʿī (d.204/820) founded one of the four schools of Islamic jurisprudence.

110. This refers to the Quranic verse: *wa-msaḥū bi-ruʾūsikum wa-arjulakum* ('wipe your heads and your feet…') (Q.5:6). Note the verb is followed by the *bāʾ* and the genitive case only with the first noun in the list, and the following noun ('feet') is in the accusative. If the *bāʾ* is understood as partitioning, then only part of the head is meant.

111. Ar: *baʿḍun lahu*, an ambiguous phrase which could mean both 'a part belonging to Him' and 'a part for His sake'.

112. Ar: *zāʾid*. This could also be translated as 'redundant'.

113. Ar: *maqdūr bayna al-qādirayn*. *Maqdūr* means literally 'the object of power', i.e. 'that which is enabled to happen', which implies there must be (at least) one who enables this to happen (*qādir*). When speaking of the divine Name *al-Qādir* (the One who possesses all ability, who gives the capacity), Ibn ʿArabī emphasises the importance of ability rather than the actual enactment: 'you need Him in order that He may provide you with the ability to carry out all the actions that Allah has ordered you to carry out' (*Kashf al-maʿnā* no: 69, ed. Pablo Beneito, Murcia, 1997, p. 148; see also the prologue to *al-Mashāhid al-asrār*, Manisa 1183/6, fol. 62a, ed. Hamed Taher as 'Sainthood and Prophecy', *Alif* 5, 1985, pp. 32–3). The two 'enablers' refers to the action of God in the perfect servant for whom God is their hearing, sight, hand etc. (see, for example, Q.48:10).

has an effect, [as is clear] through incontrovertible proof (*burhān*), whereas temporal ability has no such effect, [as is proved] through clear demonstration (*dalīl*).[114] When an effect is found in the witness in the case of temporal ability, there comes about at the level of the intellect the rational proof that this temporal power, from which appears such an effect and which is related to it, is an authentic ability that is established in [the individual's] essential potentiality.[115] There is no doubt that this effect occurs along with it, but not through it.[116] Eternal ability, however, does have this effect.

So it has become clear how the *bā'* is redundant, since it has no effect, and the effect only belongs to that which is effected. The potentiality is established because it is 'additional', meaning additional in the presence of **//11a //** action. This is why we said earlier that the dot under the *bā'*, which is the Uniqueness (*aḥadiyya*), represents 'the head of Unity',[117] as it lies between the created universe and the *bā'*. If the effect had belonged to the *bā'*, there would have been no such dot [under it]. Through the existence of the dot, it is understood that the effect belongs to it, and that the *bā'* is additional and has no effect. If [the *bā'*] had had effect, its level would have been manifested between the dot and the world, and the dot would only have been joined with it [and not with the world]. We found the matter to be supported by incontrovertible proof, as we mentioned. It is clearly additional in the eyes of anyone with sound vision.

114. These two terms are used in the Preface to the *Futūḥāt* to describe two different aspects of belief systems, based on reason and sense perception: analytical decisive proofs or indications (*dalīl qāṭiʿ*) and clear self-evident proof (*burhān sāṭiʿ*) (see *Fut*.I.31 ff.). On these terms, see Salman Bashier, 'Ibn 'Arabī's Encounter with Ibn al-Rushd', *JMIAS* 64 (2018), p. 62.

115. Ar: *thābitat al-ʿayn*. This fairly opaque passage may be understood in the light of the example which was mentioned in the previous paragraph, where Jesus apparently gave life to the birds, when giving life is a divine action.

116. Ar: *ʿindahā lā bihā*. In other words, this temporal ability is not the real cause.

117. Ar: *rā'is al-tawḥīd*.

CONCLUSION

So look at the secrets that God has included in it [the *bāʾ*]. The *bāʾ* is a noble and eminent letter: in the second chapter of the *Meccan Illuminations* (*al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*), we have mentioned its rank, its elements, the origin of its constitution, its vocalisation,[118] its splendour, its nature, the kind of mysteries it delivers, and the way in which it is connected to [all] the different letters, so you can examine these points [further] there. The *bāʾ* is a most blessed letter, bringing loving communion, intimate familiarity and munificent generosity, as well as a letter with a most effective spiritual dimension. Among the lunar mansions it possesses the [second] degree of al-Buṭayn,[119] so notice how the *bāʾ* came to be the first letter of this lunar mansion and provides those matters that the mansion is given!

My brother, reflect on what we have mentioned in this response – we have had to keep it brief because we are engaged in mysteries other than this. May God unlock the doors[120] and sections which we have put in this reply. May the most beautiful blessed salutations of peace be upon you [all],[121] as well as God's Mercy and His blessings. It is done, and praise belongs to God alone, and may God's blessing-prayer and salutations of peace be upon Muhammad and his family.[122]

[In the margin it states: 'collated with the original, it is correct, and praise be to God']

118. Ar: *ḥaraka*, literally 'movement'.

119. Literally, 'little belly [of the Lamb]', a bright trio of stars forming an isosceles triangle 'at the end of the womb of Aries' according to al-Bīrūnī, known as Botein in modern astronomy in the modern constellation of Aries. The Arabs considered it to be part of a group known as the Lamb (*al-ḥamal*), and the second lunar mansion after al-Sharaṭān ('the two signs') – see http://onesky.arizona.edu/2015/11/the-little-lamb-that-changed-the-calendar/

120. Ar: *al-abwāb*, literally 'doors' or 'gates', but also meaning 'chapters' in a book.

121. The plural here indicates that it includes all the readers of the treatise.

122. In the margin of Veliyuddin 51, fol. 131b, it states: 'I finished by reading and collating with the original in the hand of the author. It is correct, if God wills.'

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